

Message Text

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14

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13

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R 270600Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4377

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, MY

SUBJECT: SABAH POLITICS: MUSTAPHA RETIRES FROM USNO

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 4097 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY. TUN MUSTAPHA'S RESIGNATION AS PRESIDENT OF USNO WAS ANNOUNCED BY THE NOW ACTING PRESIDENT, SAID KERUAK, AUGUST 26. TUN MUSTAPHA'S DEPARTURE FROM SABAH POLITICS AFTER A QUARREL WITH KERUAK AND OTHER FORMER POLITICAL ASSOCIATES OPENS THE WAY FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN USNO AND THE RULING BERJAYA PARTY AND DISPELS FEARS THAT MUSTAPHA WOULD USE HIS WEALTH AND INFLUENCE WITH CONSERVATIVE UMNO LEADERS TO REASSERT HIS AUTHORITY IN THE BORNEAR STATE. END SUMMARY.

2. KUALA LUMPUR PAPERS THIS MORNING (AUG 27) FRONTPAGE RESIGNATION OF FORMER SABAH CHIEF MINISTER TUN DATU HAJI MUSTAPHA BIN DATU HARUN FROM THE PRESIDENCY OF HIS UNITED SABAH NATIONAL ORGANIZATION (USNO). ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MADE BY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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FORMER DEPUTY PRESIDENT, NOW ACTING PRESIDENT, TAN SRI HAJI MOHD SAID KERUAK FROM KOTA KINABALU. KERUAK SAID THAT MUSTAPHA, IN A LETTER OF RESIGNATION SENT FROM LONDON AND DATED AUGUST 20, HAD ASKED HIM TO ASSUME LEADERSHIP OF THE

PARTY. HE ALSO REPORTEDLY STATED THAT AN EMERGENCY MEETING OF USNO'S SUPREME COUNCIL WOULD BE HELD IN KOTA KINABALU TODAY AND THAT A JOINT STATEMENT WOULD BE ISSUED WITH THE RULING BERJAYA PARTY IN A FEW DAYS. IN HIS LETTER OF RESIGNATION, TUN MUSTAPHA APPARENTLY INDICATED THAT HE WOULD CONTINUE TO BE ACTIVE IN THE UNITED SABAH ISLAMIC ASSOCIATION (USIA) OF WHICH HE ALSO IS PRESIDENT.

3. RUMORS OF MUSTAPHA'S IMPENDING RESIGNATION HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING FOR OVER A WEEK. ALTHOUGH NOT STATED BY KERUAK, IT IS PRESUMED THAT MUSTAPHA WILL RESIGN AT LEAST AS STATE ASSEMBLY MAN FROM BANGGI AND POSSIBLY FROM THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT AS WELL. (MUSTAPHA DOES NOT ATTEND PARLIAMENT, HE TRADITIONALLY HAS APPLIED FOR AND RECEIVED PERMISSION TO ABSENT HIMSELF FROM ALL SESSIONS. HE ALSO RARELY TURNS UP IN THE STATE ASSEMBLY. FOR THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS HE HAS RESIDED IN AUSTRALIA AND THEN LONDON FOR MUCH LONGER PERIODS OF THE YEAR THAN HE HAS SPENT IN SABAH AND MALAYSIA.)

4. MUSTAPHA'S RESIGNATION WAS ALLEGEDLY TRIGGERED BY A QUARREL EARLIER THIS MONTH WITH TWO TRUSTED LIEUTENANTS, USNO SECRETARY GENERAL DATUK HAJI DZULKIFLI AND PARTY TREASURER DATUK SYED KECHIK, AND WITH KERUAK. WHEN MUSTAPHA LAID THE BLAME FOR LOSING THE APRIL 14 STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS AT THE DOOR OF THE THREE OTHER PARTY LEADERS, THEY, VIOLATING ALL TRADITION, TOLD HIM WHAT THEY THOUGHT OF HIS RIGID, HIGH HANDED WAY WITH THE ELECTORATE AND OF HIS ABSENTEEISM. UNUSED TO ANYTHING BUT SLAVISH OBEDIENCE, MUSTAPHA WENT OFF TO LONDON IN A HUFF AND HIS LETTER TO KERUAK FOLLOWED. OUR SOURCES REPORT THAT KERUAK SAW PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN AUGUST 24 BEFORE RETURNING TO KOTA KINABALU TO MAKE HIS ANNOUNCEMENT.

5. MUSTAPHA'S RESIGNATION REMOVES A MAJOR BARRIER TO COOPERATION BETWEEN USNO AND BERJAYA, ALTHOUGH TWO OTHERS REMAIN IN THE PERSONS OF KZULKIFLI AND YSED KECHIK, BOTH OF WHOM ARE HATED BY BERJAYA SUPPORTERS FOR THEIR ROLES AS MUSTAPHA'S HATCHET

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MEN. SAID KERUAK, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS GENERALLY WELL LIKED AND ONE PRESUMES THAT ANY JOINT EFFORT WILL CENTER ON HIM. TWO FACTORS SEEM TO HAVE PERCIPITATED MUSTAPHA'S DEPARTURE FROM USNO. THE FIRST IS THAT PATRONAGE IS THE KEY TO POLITICS IN SABAH AND TO BE WITHOUT ACCESS TO PATRONAGE IS TO BE POWERLESS. SECOND IS THE ANNOUNCEMENT JULY 12 (K.L. 4002) THAT USNO WOULD SEEK TO MERGE WITH THE RULING UNITED MALAYS NATIONAL ORGANIZATION (UMNO) WHICH IS ORGANIZED ONLY IN THE ELEVEN STATES OF PENINSULAR MALAYSIA. A MERGER BETWEEN UMNO AND USNO, ALTHOUGH HIGHLY UNLIKELY FROM THE VANTAGE POINT OF KUALA LUMPUR, APPARENTLY SEEMED REAL ENOUGH TO USNO'S MEMBERSHIP, A MAJORITY OF WHOM ARE NOT MALAYS AND

THEREFORE WOULD TECHNICALLY BE INELIGIBLE FOR MEMBERSHIP.
(SABAH'S POPULATION IN 1970 WAS 2.8 PERCENT MALAY, 28.2
PERCENT KADAZAN, 35.9 PERCENT NATIVES OF OTHER TRIBES, 21.4
PERCENT CHINESE, AND 11.7 PERCENT OTHERS.) FURTHERMORE, THERE
CONTINUES TO BE A RESIDUAL RESENTMENT OF PENINSULAR MALAYS
AND A FEAR THAT ONCE GIVEN FREE ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT AND
PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS IN SABAH THEY WILL DISPLACE SABAHANS.
(ONE STRIKE AGAINST SYED KECHIK ARE HIS KEDAH ORIGINS.)

6. SINCE JULY 12, BERJAYA HAS REPLACED THE FIVE PARTY LEADERS
KILLED IN AN AIR CRASH JUNE 6, INCLUDING CHIEF MINISTER TUN
FUAD STEPHENS, AND HAS PICKED UP FOUR ADDITIONAL STATE SEATS
AND THREE PARLIAMENTARY SEATS FROM USNO AND SABAH CHINESE
ASSOCIATION DEFECTORS. PARTY PRESIDENT AND STATE CHIEF MINISTER
DATUK HARRIS SALLEH IS NOW IN A POSITION TO AMEND THE STATE
CONSTITUTION AND DEPRIVE MUSTAPHA AND SEVERAL OF HIS COHORTS
OF PRIVILEGES WRITTEN INTO THE CONSTITUTION WHEN USNO CONTROLLED
THE ASSEMBLY. HARRIS ALSO HAS BEGUN A SERIOUS CAMPAIGN TO
CANCEL LICENSES GRANTED BY THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT THEREFORE
IT IS IMPERATIVE FOR MOST OF USNO'S FORMER SUPPORTERS TO MAKE
THEIR PEACE WITH BERJAYA OR RISK FINANCIAL DISASTER.

7. WE HAVE NO FIRST HAND INFORMATION AT THIS POINT WHAT MAY
HAVE BEEN AGREED BETWEEN KERUAK AND HARRIS BUT IMAGINE FROM
A RECENT ASSEMBLY MOVE TO AWARD A SPECIAL SALARY AND
ALLOWANCES TO THE OPPOSITION LEADER IN THE ASSEMBLY (KERUAK)
THAT WHAT MAY EMERGE IS A FORM OF COOPERATION IN WHICH KEY
USNO PEOPLE AGREE TO REMAIN AS A LOYAL OPPOSITION IN RETURN
FOR A CONTINUED SHARE OF THE GOODIES. (WHERE KECHIK AND
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DZUL FIT IN ALL THIS IS A MYSTER, HOWEVER.) NEVERTHELESS,
BERJAY'S HAND IS NOW EXTREMELY STRONG IN THE STATE AND
PREVIOUS WORRIES THAT THE WILY OLD TUN MIGHT FIND A WAY TO
REASSERT HIS DOMINANCE HAVE DISAPPEARED. WHETHER, IN ADDITION,
THE PEOPLE OF SABAH WILL GET A GOVERNMENT ATTUNED TO THEIR
WANTS AND NEEDS RATHER THAN TO THE WANTS OF A NARROW BUSINESS
ELITE REMAINS TO BE SEEN.
UNDERHILL

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